

THE BOOK OF DEATH:  
MYTH OR REVELATION?

## The Book of Death.

The “**Book of Death**” was described by Ellen White on the base of her vision, that happened during the General Conference in Sutton, Vermont, in September, 1850. Later the “Book of Death” were presented at the various editions of the book of “Great Controversy” (1858, 1884, 1888, 1911, etc), and other publications.

(1850) “Dear Brethren and Sisters... I wish to give you a short sketch of what the **Lord has recently shown to me in vision**... After the saints are changed to immortality, and are caught up together, and receive their harps, crowns, &c., and enter the Holy City, Jesus and the saints set in judgment. The books are opened, the book of life and the **book of death**; the book of life contains the good deeds of the saints,<sup>1</sup> and the **book of death** contains the evil deeds of the wicked. These books were compared with the Statute book, the Bible, and according to that they were judged. The saints in unison with Jesus pass their judgment upon the wicked dead...” [White, E. G. Dear Brethren and Sisters... – Present Truth, 1850, Nov, Vol. 1, No. 11: 86-87].

<p>86 THE PRESENT TRUTH</p> <p>Bro. Rhodes writes from Oswego, Oct. 21.—“I feel encouraged in strength of spirit to write you a short sketch of what the Lord has recently shown to me in vision. I was shown the loveliness of Jesus, and the love that the angels have for one another. Said the angel to me, ‘Ye must not withhold it; for as God’s people must love one another.’ Hence let C. blame fall on myself on a brother. I saw that the messages ‘seed that ye have sown’ and ‘reap what ye have sown’ were not to be found in the object of the words of our Saviour had not been clearly given. I saw that the object of sowing was not to give in to the world, but to labor for the salvation of others; but to spread the truth. It is a sin to support and indulge those who are able to labor, in idleness. Some have no necessities, but attend all the meetings, and go to places of God, for the love of the world. Such had much better be bus at home laboring with their hands. That ‘the thing that is good,’ to supply the wants of their families, and to be able to give to sustain the precious cause of present truth.</p> <p>Some, I saw, had erred in praying for the sick to be healed, and in calling for the sick to be healed, and for the elders of the church to pray over them, according to James v. 14, 15, we should follow the example of James. He did not unloose out of the room, then healed the sick, as is shown to be the case with the healed of the unfeared of those who have not faith, when we saw the sick among us.</p> <p>“Then I saw that at the time that Jesus took his disciples away alone, into an upper room, and first washed their feet, and then gave them to eat of the 10 loaves, and to represent his blood to them, that all should move understandingly, and follow the example of Jesus in these things, and when attending to these customs, should be zealous from unbelievers as possible.</p> <p>Then I was shown that the last plague will be poured out when Jesus leaves the sanctuary. Said the angel—“It is the wrath of God and the Lamb that causes the destruction or death of the wicked. At the voice of God the saints will be mighty and terrible as an army with banners; but they will not then execute the judgment written. The execution of the judgment will be the work of the 1000 years.</p> <p>After the saints are changed to immortality, and are caught up together, and receive their harps, crowns, &amp;c., and enter the Holy City, Jesus and the saints set in judgment. The books are opened, the book of life and the book of death; the book of life contains the good deeds of the saints, and the book of death contains the evil deeds of the wicked. These books were compared with the Statute book, the Bible, and according to that they were judged. The saints in unison with Jesus pass their judgment upon the wicked dead...”</p> <p>Bro. Rhodes writes from Oswego, Oct. 21.—“I feel encouraged in strength of spirit to write you a short sketch of what the Lord has recently shown to me in vision. I was shown the loveliness of Jesus, and the love that the angels have for one another. 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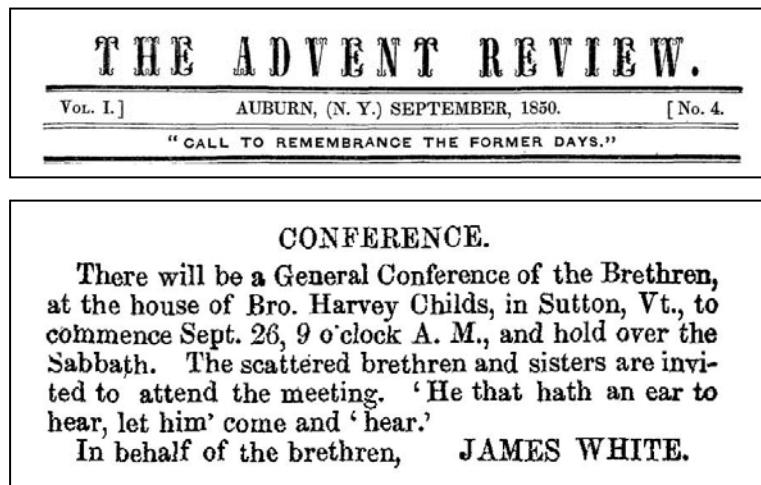
An article of E. G. White published in The Present Truth [1850, 1 (11): 86] and fragment of the article.

(1850) “A vision the Lord gave me at Sutton, Vermont, September, 1850 (246) ... Then I saw that after Jesus leaves the sanctuary the plagues will be poured out. Said the angel, It is the wrath of God and the Lamb that causes the destruction or death of the wicked. I saw that at the voice of God the saints will be mighty and terrible as an army with banners, but they will not then execute the judgment written. But after they are changed in a moment, in the twinkling of

<sup>1</sup> According the Bible, the ‘book of Life’ contains **NAMES** of the people who will be saved [Rev. 20: 15]

an eye [1 Corinthians 15:52], and are caught up with the sleeping saints [1 Thessalonians 4:17], and receive their harps, crowns, etc., and enter the city, *Jesus and the saints sit in judgment, the books are opened, the book of life and the book of death. The book of life contains the good deeds of the saints, and the book of death contains the evil deeds of the wicked. These books were compared with the statute book – the Bible – and according to that they were judged. The saints in unison with Jesus passed their judgment upon the wicked dead...*” (248) [White, E. Need for Unity Among Spiritual Shepherds. – Manuscript Releases No. 973, Vol. 12 [Nos. 921-999]: 246-252].

Information about the General Conference was published in the Advent Review: “Conference. There will be a *General Conference* of the Brethren, at the house of Bro. Harvey Childs, in Sutton, Vt., to commence Sept 26, 9 o'clock A.M., and hold over the Sabbath. The Scattered brethren and sisters are invited to attend the meeting. ‘He that hath an ear to hear, let him ‘come and hear’. In behalf of the brethren, James White.” [White, James. Conference. – In: Advent Review (Auburn, N.Y.), 1850, Sept, Vol. 1, No. 4: 16]. As far as Sept 26, 1850 was Thursday, so this General Conference held from the 26<sup>th</sup> till 28<sup>th</sup> of Sept, 1850.

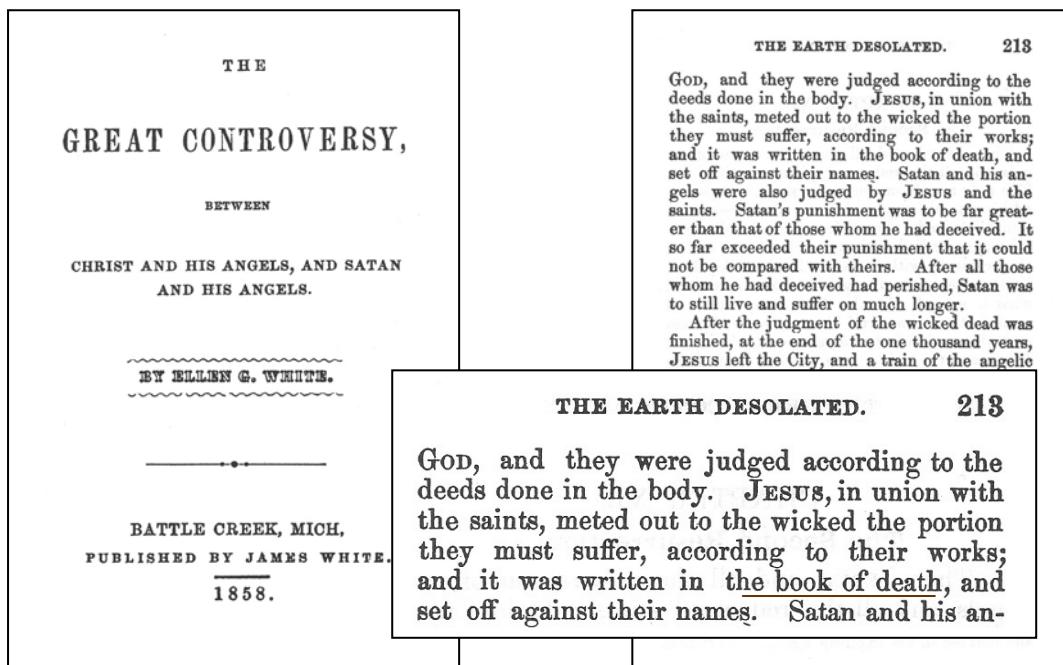


The Head of the issue of The Advent Review [1850, 1 (4): 16] and a notice about the forthcoming Conference.

(1851) “At the *general conference* of believers in the present truth, held at Sutton, (Vt.) *September, 1850, I was shown* that the seven last plagues will be poured out after Jesus leaves the Sanctuary...After the saints are changed to immortality, and are caught up together, with Jesus, receive their harps, crowns, &c., and enter the City, Jesus and the saints sit in judgment. *The books are opened, the book of life and the book of death; the book of life contains the good deeds of the saints, and the book of death contains the evil deeds of the wicked. These books were compared with the Statute book, the Bible, and according to that they were judged. The saints in unison with Jesus pass their judgment upon the wicked dead...*” [White, E.G. The Last Plagues and the Judgment. – In: A Sketch of the Christian Experience and Views of Ellen G. White. – Saratoga Springs: James White, 1851 (48): 33].

(1858) “... Jesus, in union with the saints, meted out to the wicked the portion they must suffer, according to their works; and it was written in the *book of death*, and set off against their names...” [White, Ellen. The Great Controversy between Christ and His Angels and Satan and his angels. Spiritual Gifts, Vol I. – Battle Creek: Published by James White, 1858 (219): 213].

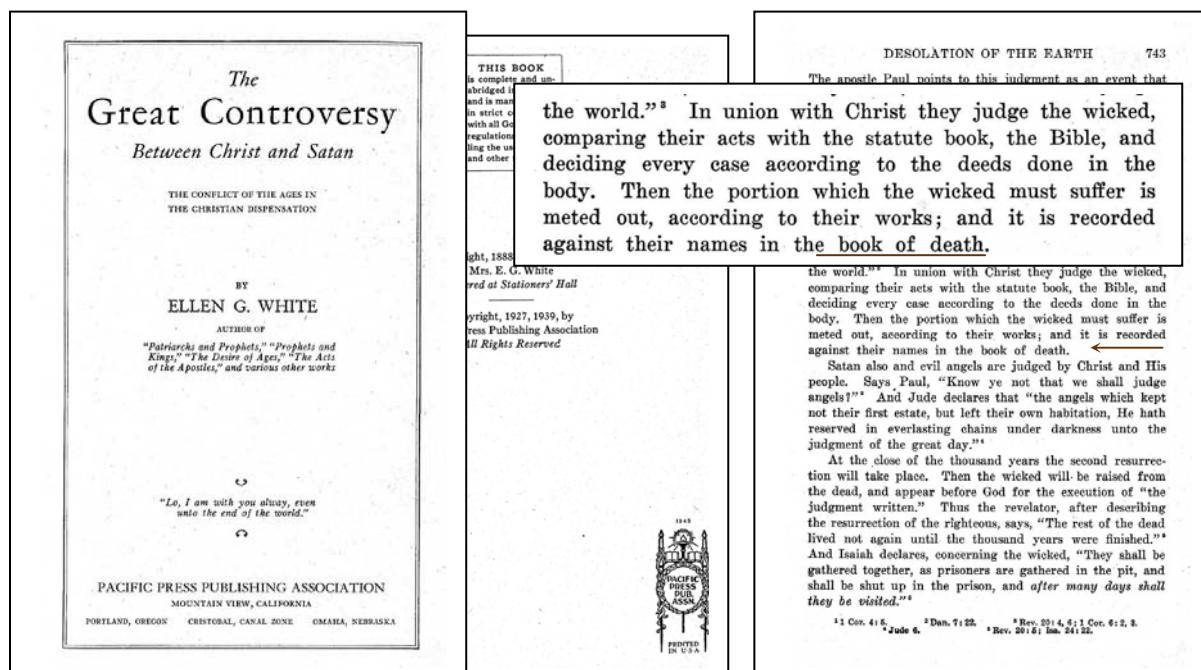
(1884) “... Then the portion which the wicked must suffer is meted out, according to their works; and it is written against their names in the *book of death*...” [White E.G. The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan. From the Destruction of Jerusalem to the End of Controversy. Spirit of Prophecy, Vol. IV. – Oakland: Pacific Press, 1884 (506): 475].



A Title page and page 213 from the book E.G. White 'Great Controversy...' published in 1858.

(1888) "... *Then the portion which the wicked must suffer is meted out, according to their works; and it is written against their names in the book of death...*" [White E.G. The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan during Christian Dispensation (13<sup>th</sup> ed). – New York & San Francisco: Pacific Press Publishing Company, 1888 (704): 661].

(1911/1945) "... *Then the portion which the wicked must suffer is meted out, according to their works; and it is recorded against their names in the book of death...*" [White E.G. The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan. The Conflict of the Ages in the Christian Dispensation. – Mountain view: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911/1945 (802): 743], etc.



A Title page and page 743 from the book E.G. White 'Great Controversy...' published in 1945 (1911 ed).

The Bible has written nothing about “**Book of Death**”, but there are books, where all works of people are written, and another book, that is “**Book of Life**” (Rev 20:12).<sup>1</sup> The Judgement for any person will be done on the base of Books of works: ‘and they were judged every man according to their works’ (Rev 20:13). The final Judgment depends on the presence or absence the name in the book of Life: ‘And whosoever was not found written in the book of Life was cast into the lake of fire (Rev 20:15).

The **Book of Life** (or similar name) can be found at the following versus:

- ‘Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin –; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy **book which thou hast written**’ (Ex 32:32).
- ‘Let them be **blotted out of the book of the living**, and not be written with the righteous’ (Psalm 69:28).
- ‘And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellow labourers, whose names are in **the book of life**’ (Philip 4:3).
- ‘He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of **the book of life**, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels’ (Rev 3:5).

Naturally, the question arises: whether the message on the “**Book of Death**” is a new divine Revelation, or the information can be classified as a fiction, or even to what is condemned in the book of Revelation: “*For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book*” (Rev 22:18).

As it has been discovered, the concept of the “**Book of Death**” is not a something new, but its description can be found in the Bible Comments of Adam Clark with the reference to the book of “Sohar Cadash” or “Zohar”, that is the foundational work in the literature of Jewish mystical thought known as Kabbalah [Scholem, 2007]:

(Rev. Chapter XX), Verse 12. *The dead, small and great* All ranks, decrees, and conditions, of men. This description seems to refer to Dan. vii. 9, 10.

*And the books were opened*] See Dan. xii, 1. “Rab. Jehuda said, all the actions of men whether good or bad, *are written in a book*; and of all they shall give account”. – Sohar, Gen. fol. 79. col. 298. “How careful should men be to shun vice, and to act uprightly before the holy blessed God: seeing there are so many which go throughout the earth, see the works of men, testify of them, *and write them in a book*.” – Ibid. 105. col. 417.

“In the first day of the New Year the holy blessed God sits, that He may judge the world; and all men, without exception, give an account themselves: and *the books of the living and the dead are opened*.” – *Sohar Chadash*, fol. 19.1. The books mentioned here were the books of the *living* and *dead*; or the *book of life* and the *book of death*: that is, the account of the good<sup>2</sup> and evil actions of men; the former leading to *life*, the latter to *death*. St. John evidently alludes here to Dan. vii 10, on which the rabbinical account of the books appears to be founded. The expressions are figurative in the both [Clark, 1823, V 2: 968].

Richard Broughton examined various ‘wrong’ religions, which included the Jewish tradition, described among them given above views with the respect to entries in the books of the life or death: “... That on the first day of the new Moon in the month of September, he (God) judges the whole world, and the next ten days he applies himself to write the just in the book of life, and the wicked in the book of death...” [Broughton, 1603, Part I: 245].

<sup>1</sup> Scriptures in this article are quoted from *The Holy Bible containing the Old and New Testaments translated out of the original tongues* (Authorized King James Version. Cleveland, New York: World Publishing Company, 1961).

<sup>2</sup> Similar description of the “Book of Life” was presented in the E. White’s ‘Vision’ [White, 1850, 1(11): 86]

Critical comments and rejections of idea of the “**book of death**” can be found in John Milton’s writings, who is usually known as an author of the poem “Paradise Lost”. As it turned out, he had not only allegoric fictions, but he also wrote had in-depth analysis of the biblical doctrines of the Christian church [Milton, 1825: 45].

In the book devoted to religious ceremonies and traditions, in the Chapter CI, ‘*The Vigil of the Chipur, or Day of Expiation*’, Bernard Picart wrote: “The ten first Days of the year are set apart for *Acts of Humiliation* and *Sorrow* for their *Sins*, and returning to *God* by a sincere *Conversion*. The Supreme Being according to the *Jews* examines the *Actions of Mankind* during the first nine Days and pronounced *Sentence* on the tenth. They fast, pray often, mortify themselves, and show the external Marks of an extraordinary *Piety*, in Order, that on the Day of the *Chipur*, they may be enrolled in the *Book of Life*, and blotted out of the **Book of Death**, wherein their Names would be found without *Repentance*” [Picart, 1741: 88].

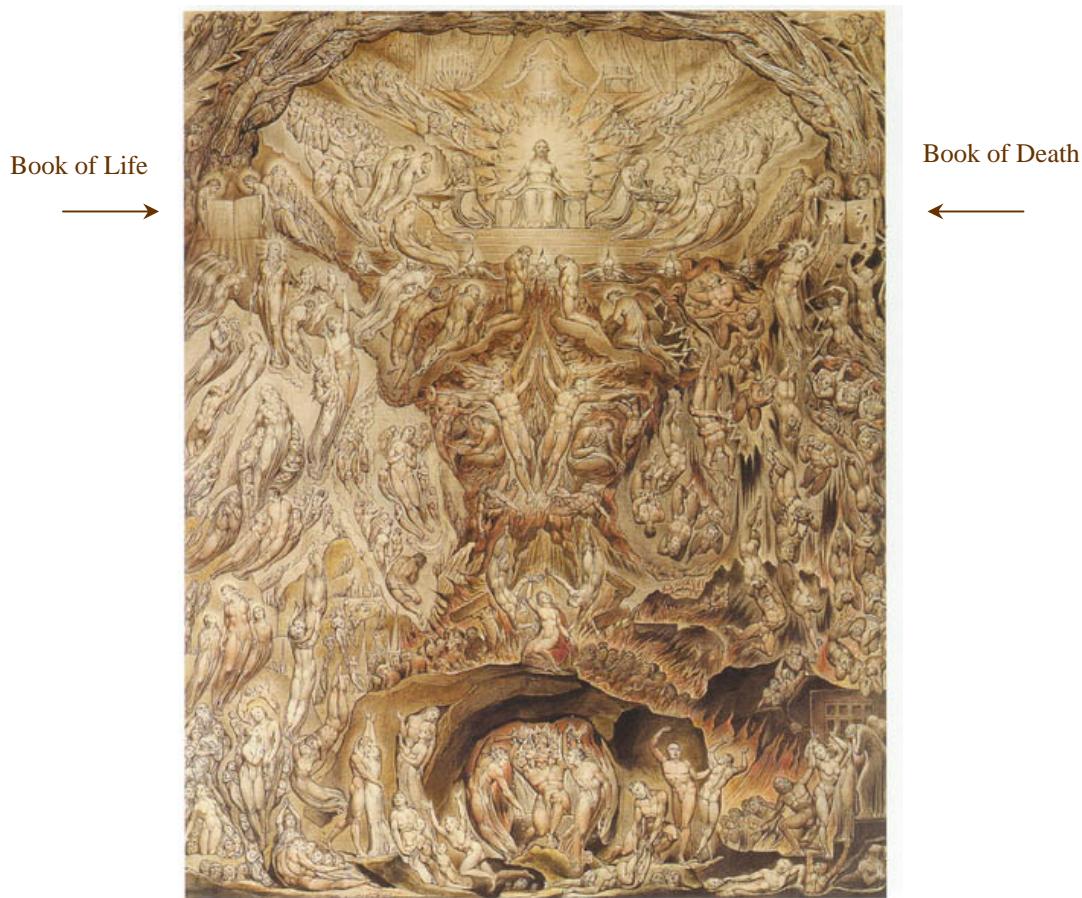
A similar description of what is usually happening at the beginning of the New Year and Yom Kippur is given in the book of John Stehelin, devoted to literature of rabbis: “Time from the Opening of the Month *Tishri*, or of the Civil Year, to the Tenth Day of that Month, inclusive, on which is celebrated *The Feast of Expiation*, the *Jews* ordinarily call *Aferes jeme Teschuvah*, i.e. *The Ten Days of Penitence*. Throughout these Ten Days, say they, *God* weighs and examines the *Actions of Men*, but passes no *Sentence* till the Day of *Expiation*. Between the *Feast of the New Year*, therefore, and this Day, the *Jews* are wont to emaciate their bodies with *Fasting*, to be much in *Prayer*, and to affect *Abundance of Piety*, to the End, that, in Case they are entered in the **book of Death**, or are given up to an *Evil Year*, *God* may be induced, by their present *Repentance* and *good Works*, to transfer, on the Day of *Expiation*, their Names in to the *Book of Life*, and issue a *Decree* in their *Favour*. On the *Sabbath* between the first and tenth Day of this Month, which *Sabbath* is called *The Sabbath of Penitence* there is usually *Preaching* in the *Synagogues*, to exhort the *People* to *Repentance* and *good Works*, and the *Study* and *Observation* of the *Law* [Stehelin, 1748; V2: 334].

Isaac Newton, describing the events associated with the day of Yom Kippur, reported three books: “This sealing alludes to a tradition of the *Jews*, that upon the day of *expiation* all the *people of Israel* are sealed up in the *books of life and death*. For the *Jews* in their *Talmud* tell us, that in the beginning of every new year, or first day of the month *Tisri*, the seventh month of the sacred year, three books are opened in judgment; the *Book of Life*, in which the names of those are written who are perfectly just; the **Book of Death**, in which the names of those are written who are *atheists*, or very wicked; and a third Book, of those whose judgment is suspended till the day of *expiation*, and whose names are not written in the *Book of Life* or **Death** before that day. The first ten days of this month they call the penitential days; and all these days they fast and pray very much, and are very devout, that on the tenth day their fins may be remitted, and their names may be written in the *Book of Life*; which day is therefore called the day of *expiation*. And upon this tenth day, in returning home from the *synagogues*, they say to one another, ‘*God the Creator seal you to a good year*.’ For they conceive that the books are now sealed up, and that the sentence of *God* remains unchanged henceforward to the end of the year. The same thing is signified by the two goats, upon whole foreheads the high-priest yearly, on the day of *expiation*, says the two lots inscribed, ‘*For God*’, and ‘*For Azazel*’; *God’s* lot signifying the *people* who are sealed with the name of *God* in their foreheads; and the lot *Azazel*, which was sent into the *wilderness*, representing those who receive the mark and name of the *beast*, and go into the *wilderness* with the great *Whore*” [Newton, 1785, V5: 457-458].

Isaac Penington gives a description of both the *Book of Life* and the **Book of Death** from the point of view of Christian Doctrines: “And of very great importance to all that call themselves *Christians*, and hope for a *Share* in the *Book of Life*, and the escaping the *Damnation of Hell*; which is their *Portion* whose names are written in the **Book of Death**, and blotted by *God* out of the *Book of Life*, though they hope to find them written there” [Penington, 1761: 196].

Subsequently, the idea of the Book of Life, with the names of the saved, and the **Book of Death**, with the names of those condemned to death, can be found in other Christian authors [Cobbin, 1837: 1307; Williams, 1837, V1: 135; Purdon, 1871, V26 : 188-189], and as a rule they pointed that origin of them were from the Talmudic tradition [Cobbin, 1837: 1307; Williams, 1837, V1: 135]. [Cobbin, 1837: 1307; Williams, 1837, V1: 135].

Claudius Pitrat analyzes the pagan origins of various Christian doctrines, and writes about the Book of Life and the **Book of Death**, which are made in the names of survivors and prisoners, as well as a book with the names of people whose fate is not yet decided. At the trial, presided god Minos (mythical king of Crete), based on the evidence about the affairs of the dead, the final decision on their fate and their names are entered in the appropriate book for the saved or condemned. The author believes that the Roman Catholic Church has inherited the idea of two Books on the pagan religion, and instead of the third book, it uses the concept of purgatory [Pitrat, 1857: 186-187, 208, 213-214].



William Blake, "The Last Judgment" (1909): Book of Life on the right and Book of Death on the left.

Books of Life and **Death**, as well as other heavenly books have been reflected in literature and the pictures. In particular, William Carleton, in his book 'Black Prophet', suggested a book of wedding, a **book of death** and a book of the court [Carleton, 1847: 201].

On the picture of William Blake "The Last Judgment" (Jan 18, 1808), an opened Book of Life displayed to the right of the throne of the judge, and an opened **Book of Death** displayed on the left. According to the author, he repeatedly had visions of the plots of which are displayed on the pictures. A detailed description of the picture can be found in the letter of the artist [Smith, 1828, V 2: 483].

Summing up the analysis of the literature on “the books of heaven,” it can be concluded that the roots of the not biblical idea of the ‘Book of Death’ as well as a doctrine of investigations before the day of Yom Kippur was in the Talmudic tradition, and even earlier, in the pagan idea of the coming judgment.

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